

GSENM host forum on soil crust

KANAB, Utah – What is biological soil crust and why is it important to the southern Utah/northern Arizona rangelands? This is just one of many questions that will be posed to a panel of scientists from around the country during the Biological Soil Crust Forum being held at the Kanab City Library August 6, 2014 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The forum is being co-sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and the National Park Service's Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The public is invited to participate in this free event.

Biological soil crust is a complex mosaic of living organisms—algae, cyanobacteria (blue-green algae), bacteria, lichens, mosses, liverworts, and fungi—that grow on or just below the soil surface. Crusts are common worldwide in arid and semi-arid shrub lands, grasslands and woodlands.

"During our public scoping process and comment period for the Livestock Grazing Plan Amendment to the Monument Management Plan, we heard that biological soil crust is a concern," said Cindy Staszak, GSENM manager.

"We knew we needed to get a better understanding of biological soil crusts and their role in our area ecosystems as we went into the planning process. We are looking to this panel of experts to help us, our cooperating agencies, which include Kane and Garfield Counties, the State of Utah, and the other federal agencies, to learn more about biological soil crusts so we are able to make the best possible decisions about managing livestock grazing."

The forum will begin promptly at 9 a.m. on August 6 with a welcome from Staszak and introductions of the panel members. At 9:30, panel session #1, *"What do we know about biological soil crust in our planning area?"* begins; followed by panel session #2, *"What are our options for management actions?"* at 12:30 p.m.; and panel session #3, *"What else don't we know?"* at 2:30 p.m. Within each session, the public will be invited to ask questions of the panel. At the end of the day, BLM and NPS managers will explain the next steps in the planning process.

Panel members are Dr. Matthew Bowker, Northern Arizona University; Dr. Jayne Belnap, United States Geological Survey; Dr. Janis Boettinger, Utah State University; Dr. Fee Busby, Utah State University; and Dr. Kim Anderson, US Forest Service.

The event is also being simulcast over the internet at www.blm.gov/live. For additional information contact Larry Crutchfield at 435-644-1200 or via email at lcrutchf@blm.gov.